

PRIMARY CARE

Rules

- 1) A center shall implement a primary care system so that each child between the ages of birth and 3 years has a primary caregiver to provide all of the following:
 - (a) Continuity of one (1) relationship so that a child has as few primary caregivers, including substitute caregivers, as possible during any given day, within any given week, and over an extended period of time. The number of children assigned to a primary caregiver for primary care shall not exceed the staff/child ratio. Each child is to have no more than 2 primary caregivers in a day and no more than 4 primary caregivers in a week. For centers operating less than 24 hours a day, an exception may occur during the first hour after the center opens and the hour prior to closing. For centers operating 24 hours a day, infants and toddlers shall be in the care of a primary caregiver 90% of the day.
 - (b) Continuity of care to allow children and their primary giver to develop nurturing relationships over time.
 - (c) Appropriate social-emotional interaction, which includes interacting with the child during routines and play activities, and providing guidance that helps the child develop social skills and emotional well being.
- 2) Primary caregiving assignments shall be posted where parents can see them.

Interpretation Manual

- 1) The lead teacher shall work closely with other primary caregivers when planning, implementing and assessing the infant toddler program. Parents shall have opportunity for input into the process when planning for the needs of their individual children.
- 2) Group assignments shall be made to allow children to remain together, within the group, to foster positive social-emotional peer relationships.
- 3) When a child is moved from one assigned group to another, the transition shall be planned so the child receives emotional support from the primary caregiver and from the child's peers.

Rationale*

The security of a child's attachment to primary caregivers provides a base for the child's social-emotional development, as well as for all other learning. Group care that occurs in an intimate setting with primary, continuous caregiving fosters the growth of such attachments.

Primary care, the assignment of a specific caregiver to each child, encourages the forming of close relationships. Through primary care, the caregiver, the child and the child's family develop bonds of comfort, familiarity, trust, and love. Primary care works best when caregivers work together as a team, providing the child with secondary caregivers with whom s/he feels comfortable.

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The primary caregiver is an adult caregiver who 1) provides the majority of the nurturing activities for a child during the day, 2) is well acquainted with the child's individual needs, temperament and daily rhythms, 3) respects and understands each family's culture and the family's vision and goals for the child, and 4) works with the parents and other primary caregivers in planning for the child.

The concept of primary caregiving has three (3) basic elements: 1) continuity of one relationship, 2) continuity of care, and 3) appropriate social interaction.

Continuity of one relationship means a child has as few primary caregivers as possible during any given day and within any given week. A child is to have no more than 2 primary caregivers in a day and no more than 4 primary caregivers in a week.

Continuity of care keeps primary caregivers and their assigned children together over time, so that loving relationships between caregivers and children and between the children themselves can develop. Group care that supports the child's attachment to a specific caregiver and small group of children over time promotes the child's healthy growth and development. Daily interchanges with familiar adults and children give the child's world a comforting and empowering predictability. Continuity of care facilitates a stronger caregiver-child attachment, the development of trust, and diminishes separation and stranger anxieties.

Appropriate social interaction promotes the positive social development of the child; this begins with the nurturing behavior of the primary caregiver. Appropriate social interaction includes interacting with the child during routines and play activities, and providing guidance that helps the child develop social skills.

* Adapted from *The Program for Infant Toddler Caregivers*, developed collaboratively by WestEd and the California Department of Education, and Primary Caregiving—No Easy Task!, Carole M. Grates, *Better Homes and Centers*, 1998